



February 28, 2019

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

In the words of Romans 8: 28, 31, 35, and 37-39,

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

What then are we to say about these things?

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The 2019 General Conference's Special Session to consider the United Methodist Church's stance on human sexuality ended yesterday and a number of people have reached out to me. Some feel relieved the Conference delegates reaffirmed a traditional interpretation of scripture. Others feel broken-hearted that the Conference did not affirm the place and giftedness of all God's people. Everyone has been concerned about what this means for our beloved Towson United Methodist Church family. Will we split? If so, will the church remain viable? What will happen next?

Organizationally speaking, the answer is not clear. You are invited to gather at Towson UMC on Saturday, March 2, at 9:00 AM. Together, we will watch livestream video coverage of the Bishop's "Town Hall Meeting" during which she will give us her understanding of the Special Session of General Conference as well as answer questions. Keep in mind, the Judicial Council will review the results of this General Conference session to determine if its decisions are constitutional. Thirdly, our Annual Conference, at the end of May 2019, will begin the conversation of how our Baltimore-Washington Conference will respond. And finally, regardless of what happens there will be eighteen months to two years for things to shake out and be implemented. So, there are still many questions. It is not the time for any of us to be making decisions about whether or not we will remain members of the United Methodist Church.

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410.823.6511 • 501 Hampton Lane, Towson, MD 21286 • www.towsonumc.org

Sunday Worship: 8:00 AM and 10:15 AM • Office Hours: Mon-Thurs 10:00 AM – 3:00 PM

• Rev. Dr. Mark Johnson, Lead Pastor • Rev. Margery Schammel, Assistant Pastor

While things are hazy organizationally, they are crystal clear theologically and practically. Nothing that occurred at the Special Session of General Conference changes our Church's commitment to love and serve all God's children. Our Welcoming Statement says very clearly:

"We believe every person is of sacred worth and created in God's image. We commit to Jesus' example of inclusive love, care, and intentional hospitality with persons of every race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, faith story, physical or mental ability, economic status, or political perspective. We respect our diversity of opinion and expressions of faith. Therefore, as God loves us, so let us love and serve in the name of Christ."

Further, as disciples of Jesus Christ, the ministry of each Towson UMC member is to reach out and serve in the Spirit and name of Jesus. I have mentioned many times that we may be theologically diverse, but we are united in Jesus to do the work to which Jesus calls us. That work is not to divide, dominate, and demean but rather to reach out with servants' hearts and serve others to the end that each person comes to know the peace, hope, justice, love, and fullness of Jesus.

Is there anyone who is sick? Is there anyone who is hungry? Is there anyone who is lonely? Is there anyone who is oppressed? Is there anyone who has not yet heard the Good News of Jesus Christ? Is there anyone, anywhere, who is not yet growing by the power of the Holy Spirit to love God with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength and their neighbor as themselves? If so, then there is real spiritual and physical work to be done to know and make Jesus known. And there is no time to delay.

What do we know now about the future of the United Methodist Church as a denomination and, specifically, about our Church? Nothing. Regardless of our name, logo, and structure, you and I are part of a Church family that Jesus called into being and that has life-changing ministry to do.

Maybe that is all we need to know.

Join me on Saturday morning for the Bishop's meeting, either at Towson UMC or by livestream from your home. Gather with me, and the rest of your Church family, on Sunday. If you want to chat, let's chat. Together, we will journey through this.

In Christ's Love,



Rev. Dr. Mark Johnson

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